QUAYLE

THE HERO SERIES

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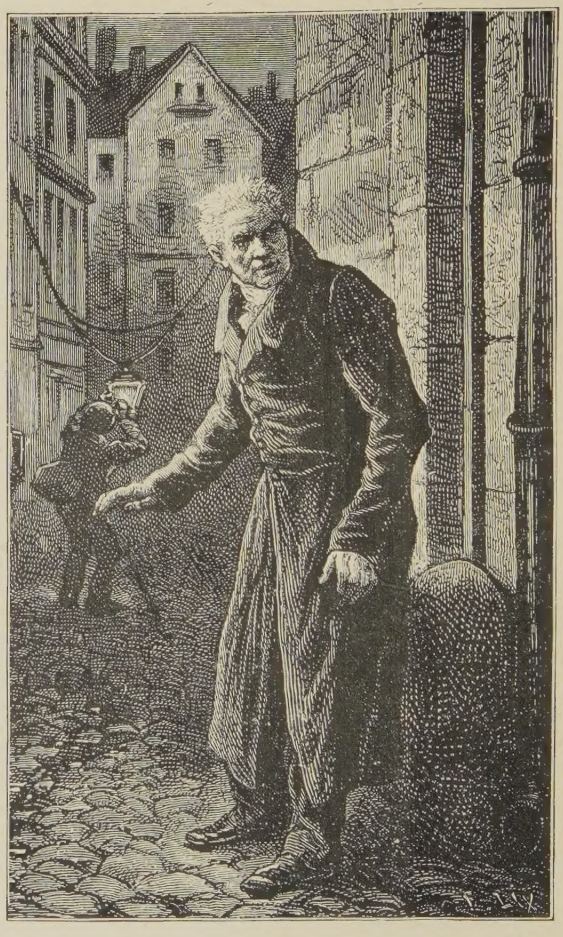

*THE HERO SERIES*

# A HERO
# JEAN VALJEAN

BY

WILLIAM A. QUAYLE

Author of "THE POET'S POET," Etc.

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# A Hero
# Jean Valjean

THE hero is not a luxury, but a necessity. We can no more do without him than we can do without the sky. Every best man and woman is at heart a hero-worshiper. Emerson acutely remarks that all men admire Napoleon because he was themselves in possibility. They were in miniature what he was developed. For a like though nobler reason, all men love heroes. They are ourselves grown tall, puissant, victorious, and sprung into nobility, worth, service. The hero electrifies the world; he is the lightning of the soul, illuminating our sky, clarifying the air, making it thereby salubrious and delightful. What any elect spirit did, inures to the credit of us all. A frag-

ment of Lowell's clarion verse may stand for the biography of heroism:

"When a deed is done for Freedom, through the broad earth's aching breast
Runs a thrill of joy prophetic, trembling on from east to west;
And the slave, where'er he cowers, feels the soul within him climb
To the awful verge of manhood, as the energy sublime
Of a century bursts full-blossomed on the thorny stem of Time;"

such being the undeniable result and history of any heroic service.

But the world's hero has changed. The old hero was Ulysses, or Achilles, or Æneas. The hero of Greek literature is Ulysses, as Æneas is in Latin literature. But to our modern thought these heroes miss of being heroic. We have outgrown them as we have outgrown dolls and marbles. To be frank, we do not admire Æneas nor Ulysses. Æneas wept too often and too copiously. He impresses us as a big cry-baby. Of this trinity of classic heroes—Ulysses, Æneas, and Achilles—Ulysses is least obnoxious. This statement is cold and unsatisfactory, and apparently unappreciative, but it is candid and just. Lodge, in his "Some Accepted Heroes," has done service in rubbing the gilding from Achilles, and showing that he was gaudy and cheap. We thought

the image was gold, which was, in fact, thin gilt. Achilles sulks in his tent, while Greek armies are thrown back defeated from the Trojan gates. In nothing is he admirable save that, when his pouting fit is over and when he rushes into the battle, he has might, and overbears the force opposing him as a wave does some petty obstacle. But no higher quality shines in his conquest. He is vain, brutal, and impervious to high motive. In Æneas one can find little attractive save his filial regard. He bears Anchises on his shoulders from toppling Troy; but his wanderings constitute an Odyssey of commonplaces, or chance, or meanness. No one can doubt Virgil meant to create a hero of commanding proportions, though we, looking at him from this far remove, find him uninteresting, unheroic, and vulgar; and why the goddess should put herself out to allay tempests in his behalf, or why hostile deities should be disturbed to tumble seas into turbulence for such a voyager, is a query. He merits neither their wrath nor their courtesy. I confess to liking heroes of the old Norse mythology better. They, at least, did not cry nor grow voluble with words when obstacles obstructed the march. They possess the merit of tremendous action. Æneas, in this regard, is the inferior of Achilles. Excuse us from hero worship, if Æneas be hero. In this old company of heroes, Ulysses is

easy superior. Yet the catalogue of his virtues is an easy task. Achilles was a huge body, associated with little brain, and had no symptom of sagacity. In this regard, Ulysses outranks him, and commands our respect. He has diplomacy and finesse. He is not simply a huge frame, wrestling men down because his bulk surpasses theirs. He has a thrifty mind. He is the man for councils of war, fitted to direct with easy mastery of superior acumen. His fellow-warriors called him "crafty," because he was brainy. He was schooled in stratagem, by which he became author of Ilium's overthrow. Ulysses was shrewd, brave, balanced—possibly, though not conclusively, patriotic—a sort of Louis XI, so far as we may form an estimate, but no more. He was selfish, immoral, barren of finer instincts, who was loved by his dog and by Penelope, though for no reason we can discover. Ten years he fought before Troy, and ten years he tasted the irony of the seas—in these episodes displaying bravery and fortitude, but no homesick love for Penelope, who waited at the tower of Ithaca for him, a picture of constancy sweet enough to hang on the palace walls of all these centuries. We do not think to love Ulysses, nor can we work ourselves up to the point of admiration; and he is the best hero classic Rome and Greece can offer. No! Register, as the modern sense of the classic hero, we do not like him.

He is not admirable, yet is not totally lacking in power to command attention. What is his quality of appeal to us? This: He is action; and action thrills us. The old hero was, in general, brave and brilliant. He had the tornado's movement. His onset redeems him. He blustered, was spectacular, heartless, and did not guess the meaning of purity; but he was warrior, and the world enjoys soldiers. And this motley hero has been attempted in our own days. He was archaic, but certain have attempted to make him modern. Byron's Don Juan is the old hero, only lost to the old hero's courage. He is a villain, with not sense enough to understand he is unattractive. He is a libertine at large, who thinks himself a gentleman. Don Juan is as immoral, impervious to honor, and as villainous as the Greek gods. The D'Artagnan romances have attempted the old hero's resuscitation. The movement of the "Three Musketeers" is mechanical rather than human. D'Artagnan's honor is limited to his fealty to his king. He has no more sense of delicacy toward women, or honor for them as women, than Achilles had. Some of his doings are too defamatory to be thought of, much less mentioned. No! Excuse me from D'Artagnan and the rest of Dumas' heroes. They may be French, but they are not heroic. About Dumas' romances there is a gallop which, with the un-

wary, passes for action and art. But he has not, of his own motion, conceived a single woman who was not seduced or seducible, nor a single man who was not a libertine; for "The Son of Porthros" and his bride are not of Dumas' creation. He is not open to the charge of having drawn the picture of one pure man or woman. Zola is the natural goal of Dumas; and we enjoy neither the route nor the terminus. Louis XIV, Charles II, and George IV are modeled after the old licentious pretense at manhood, but we may all rejoice that they deceive nobody now. Our civilization has outgrown them, and will not, even in second childhood, take to such playthings.

But what was the old hero's chief failure? The answer is, He lacked conscience. Duty had no part in his scheme of action, nor in his vocabulary of word or thought. Our word "virtue" is the bodily importation of the old Roman word "virtus," but so changed in meaning that the Romans could no more comprehend it than they could the Copernican theory of astronomy. With them, "virtus" meant strength—that only—a battle term. The solitary application was to fortitude in conflict. With us, virtue is shot through and through with moral quality, as a gem is shot through with light, and monopolizes the term as light monopolizes the gem. This change is radical and astonishing, but discloses a change

which has revolutionized the world. The old hero was conscienceless—a characteristic apparent in Greek civilization. What Greek patriot, whether Themistocles or Demosthenes, applied conscience to patriotism? They were as devoid of practical conscience as a Metope of the Parthenon was devoid of life. Patriotism was a transient sentiment. Demosthenes could become dumb in the presence of Philip's gold; and in a fit of pique over mistreatment at the hands of his brother-citizens, Themistocles became a traitor, and, expatriated, dwelt a guest at the Persian court. Strangely enough—and it is passing strange—the most heroic personality in Homer's Iliad, the Greek's "Bible of heroisms," was not the Atridæ, whether Agamemnon or Menelaus; not Ajax nor Achilles, nor yet Ulysses; but was Hector, the Trojan, who appears to greater advantage as hero than all the Grecian host. And Homer was a Greek! This is strange and unaccountable irony. Say once more, the old hero's lack was conscience. He, like his gods and goddesses, who were deified infamies, was a studied impurity. Jean Valjean is a hero, but a hero of a new type.

Literature is a sure index of a civilization. Who cares to settle in his mind whether the world grows better, may do so by comparing contemporaneous literature with the reading of other days. "The Heptameron," of Margaret of Na-

varre, is a book so filthy as to be nauseating. That people could read it from inclination is unthinkable; and to believe that a woman could read it, much less write it, taxes too sorely our credulity. In truth, this work did not, in the days of its origin, shock the people's sensibilities. A woman wrote it, and she a sister of Francis I of France, and herself Queen of Navarre, and a pure woman. And her contemporaries, both men and women, read it with delight, because they had parted company with blushes and modesty. Zola is less voluptuous and filthy than these old tales. Some things even Zola curtains. Margaret of Navarre tears the garments from the bodies of men and women, and looks at their nude sensuality smilingly. Of Boccaccio's "Decameron," the same general observations hold; save that they are less filthy, though no less sensual. In the era producing these tales, witness this fact: The stories are represented as told by a company of gentlemen and ladies, the reciter being sometimes a man, sometimes a woman; the place, a country villa, whither they had fled to escape a plague then raging in Florence. The people, so solacing themselves in retreat from a plague they should have striven to alleviate by their presence and ministries, were the gentility of those days, representing the better order of society, and told stories which would now be venal if told by vulgar men in some

tavern of ill-repute. That Boccaccio should have reported these tales as emanating from such a company is proof positive of the immodesty of those days, whose story is rehearsed in the "Decameron." Rousseau's "Confessions" is another book showing the absence of current morality in his age. Notwithstanding George Eliot's panegyric, these memoirs are the production of unlimited conceit, of a practical absence of any moral sensitiveness; and while Rousseau could not be accused of being sensual, nor amorous and heartless as Goethe, he yet shows so crude a moral state as to render him unwholesome to any person of ordinary morals in the present day. His "Confessions," instead of being naive, strike me as being distinctly and continuously coarse. A man and woman who could give their children deliberately to be farmed out, deserting them as an animal would not, and this with no sense of loss or compunction, nor even with a sense of the inhumanity of such procedure—such a man and woman tell us how free-love can degrade a natively virtuous mind. Such was Rousseau; and his "Confessions" are like himself, unblushing, because shameless. These books reflect their respective ages, and are happily obsolete now. Such memoirs and fictions in our day are unthinkable as emanating from respectable sources; and if written would be located in vile haunts in the

purlieus of civilization. Gauged by such a test, the world is seen to be better, and immensely better. We have sailed out of sight of the old continent of coarse thinking, and are sailing a sea where purity of thought and expression impregnate the air like odors. The old hero, with his lewdness and rhodomontade, is excused from the stage. We have had enough of him. Even Cyrano de Bergerac is so out of keeping with the new notion of the heroic, that the translator of the drama must apologize for his hero's swagger. We love his worth, though despising his theatrical air and acts. We are done with the actor, and want the man. And this new hero is proof of a new life in the soul, and, therefore, more welcome than the glad surprise of the first meadow-lark's song upon the brown meadows of the early spring.

A reader need not be profound, but may be superficial, and yet discover that Jean Valjean is fashioned after the likeness of Jesus. Michael Angelo did not more certainly model the dome of St. Peter's after Brunelleschi's dome of the Duomo than Hugo has modeled his Valjean after Christ. We are not necessarily aware of ourselves, nor of our era, until something discovers both to us, as we do not certainly know sea air when we feel it. I doubt if most men would recognize the tonic of sea air if they did not know the sea was neighbor to them. We sight the

ocean, and then know the air is flooded with a health as ample as the seas from which it blows. So we can not know our intellectual air is saturated with Christ, because we can not go back. We lack contemporaneous material for contrast. We are, ourselves, a part of the age, as of a moving ship, and can not see its motion. We can not realize the world's yesterdays. We know them, but do not comprehend them, since between apprehending and comprehending an epoch lie such wide spaces. "Quo Vadis" has done good in that it has popularized a realization of that turpitude of condition into which Christianity stepped at the morning of its career; for no lazar-house is so vile as the Roman civilization when Christianity began—God's angel—to trouble that cursed pool. Christ has come into this world's affairs unheralded, as the morning does not come; for who watches the eastern lattices can see the morning star, and know the dawn is near. Christ has slipped upon the world as a tide slips up the shores, unnoted, in the night; and because we did not see him come, did not hear his advent, his presence is not apparent. Nothing is so big with joy to Christian thought as the absolute omnipresence of the Christ in the world's life. Stars light their torches in the sky; and the sky is wider and higher than the stars. Christ is such a sky to modern civilization.

Plainly, Jean Valjean is meant for a hero. Victor Hugo loves heroes, and has skill and inclination to create them. His books are biographies of heroism of one type or another. No book of his is heroless. In this attitude he differs entirely from Thackeray and Hawthorne, neither of whom is particularly enamored of heroes. Hawthorne's romances have not, in the accepted sense, a single hero. He does not attempt building a character of central worth. He is writing a drama, not constructing a hero. In a less degree, this is true of Thackeray. He truly loves the heroic, and on occasion depicts it. Henry Esmond and Colonel Newcome are mighty men of worth, but are exceptions to Thackeray's method. He pokes fun at them even. "Vanity Fair" he terms a novel without a hero. He photographs a procession. "The Virginians" contains no character which can aspire to centrality, much less might. He, loving heroes, attempts concealing his passion, and, if accused of it, denies the accusation. After reading all his writings, no one could for a moment claim that Thackeray was the biographer of heroes. He is a biographer of meanness, and times, and sham aristocracy and folks, and can, when he cares to do so, portray heroism lofty as tallest mountains. With Hugo all is different. He will do nothing else than dream and depict heroism and heroes.

He loves them with a passion fervent as desert heats. His pages are ablaze with them. Somebody lifting up the face, and facing God in some mood or moment of briefer or longer duration—this is Hugo's method. In "Toilers of the Sea," Galliatt, by almost superhuman effort, and physical endurance and fortitude and fertility in resource, defeats octopus and winds and rocks and seas, and in lonely triumph pilots the wreck home—and all of this struggle and conquest for love! He is a somber hero, but a hero still, with strength like the strength of ten, since his love is as the love of a legion. The power to do is his, and the nobility to surrender the woman of his love; and there his nobility darkens into stoicism, and he waits for the rising tide, watching the outgoing ship that bears his heart away unreservedly—waits, only eager that the tide ingulf him.

In "Ninety-Three," the mother of the children in the burning tower is heroine. In "By Order of the King," Dea is heroic, and spotless as "Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat;" and Ursus, a vagabond, is fatherhood in its sweet nobleness; and Gwynplaine, disfigured and deserted—a little lad set ashore upon a night of hurricane and snow, who, finding in his wanderings a babe on her dead mother's breast, rescues this bit of winter storm-drift, plodding on through un-

tracked snows, freezing, but no more thinking to drop his burden than the mother thought to desert it—Gwynplaine is a hero for whose deed an epic is fitting. Quasimodo, the hunchback of Notre Dame, found, after long years, holding in his skeleton arms a bit of woman's drapery and a woman's skeleton—Quasimodo, hideous, herculean, hungry-hearted, tender, a hunchback, yet a lover and a man—who denies to Quasimodo a hero's laurels? In "Les Miserables" are heroes not a few. Gavroche, that green leaf blown about Paris streets; Fantine, the mother; Eponine, the lover; Bishop Bienvenu, the Christian; Jean Valjean, the man,—all are heroic folk. Our hearts throb as we look at them. Gavroche, the lad, dances by as though blown past by the gale. Fantine, shorn of her locks of gold; Fantine, with her bloody lips, because her teeth have been sold to purchase medicine for her sick child—her child, yet a child of shame; Fantine, her mother's love omnipotent, lying white, wasted, dying, expectantly looking toward the door, with her heart beating like a wild bird, beating with its wings against cage-bars, anxious for escape: Fantine, watching for her child Cossette, watching in vain, but watching; Fantine, dying, glad because Monsieur Madeleine has promised he will care for Cossette as if the babe were his; Fantine, dead, with her face turned toward the door, look-

ing in death for the coming of her child,—Fantine affects us like tears and sobbing set to music. Look at her; for a heroine is dead. And Eponine, with the gray dawn of death whitening her cheeks and gasping, "If—when—if when," now silent, for she is choked by the rush of blood and stayed from speech by fierce stabs of pain, but continuing, "When I am dead—a favor—a favor, Monsieur Marius [silence once again to wrestle with the throes of death]—a favor—a favor when I am dead [now her speech runs like frightened feet], if you will kiss me; for indeed, Monsieur Marius, I think I loved you a little—I—I shall feel—your kiss—in death." Lie quiet in the darkening night, Eponine! Would you might have a queen's funeral, since you have shown anew the moving miracle of woman's love!

Bishop Bienvenu is Hugo's hero as saint; and we can not deny him beauty such as those "enskied and sainted" wear. This is the romancist's tribute to a minister of God; and sweet the tribute is. With not a few, the bishop is chief hero, next to Jean Valjean. He is redemptive, like the purchase money of a slave. He is quixotic; he is not balanced always, nor always wise; but he falls on the side of Christianity and tenderness and goodness and love—a good way to fall, if one is to fall at all. We love the bishop, and can not help it. He was good to the poor, tender to the

erring, illuminative to those who were in the moral dark, and came over people like a sunrise; crept into their hearts for good, as a child creeps up into its father's arms, and nestles there like a bird. Surely we love the bishop. He is a hero saint. To be near him was to be neighborly with heaven. He was ever minding people of God. Is there any such office in earth or heaven? To look at this bishop always puts our heart in the mood of prayer, and what helps us to prayer is a celestial benefit. The pertinent fact in him is, that he is not greatness, but goodness. We do not think of greatness when we see him or hear him, but we think with our hearts when he is before our eyes. Goodness is more marketable than greatness, and more necessary. Goodness, greatness! Brilliancy is a cheap commodity when put on the counter beside goodness; and Bishop Bienvenu is a romancer's apotheosis of goodness, and we bless him for this deification.

The bishop was merchantman, freighting ships. His wharves are wide, his fleet is great, his cargoes are many. Only he is freighting ships for heaven. No bales of merchandise nor ingots of iron, but souls for whom Christ died,—these are his cargoes; and had you asked him, "What work to-day?" a smile had flooded sunlight along his face while he said, "Freighting souls with God to-day, and lading cargoes for the

skies." This is royal merchandise. The Doge of Venice annually flung a ring into the sea as sign of Venice's nuptials with the Adriatic; but Bishop Bienvenu each day wedded himself and the world to heaven, and he comes

> "O'er my ear like the sweet south,
> That breathes upon a bank of violets,
> Stealing and giving odor."

Hugo paints with sunset tints and with lightning's lurid light; his contrasts are fierce, his backgrounds are often as black as a rain-cloud. He paints with the mad rush of a Turner. He is fierce in hates and loves. He does nothing by moderation. Calmness does not belong to him. He is tempestuous always; but tempests are magnificent and purifying to the air. Hugo is painting, and painting heroes, and his hero of heroes is Valjean. Jean Valjean is conscience. In Macbeth, conscience is warring and retributive. In Richard III, conscience, stifled in waking, speaks in dreams, and is menace, like a sword swung by a maniac's hands. In Arthur Dimmesdale, conscience is lacerative. In Jean Valjean, conscience is regulative, creative, constructive. Jean Valjean is conscience, and conscience is king. What the classic heroes lacked, Jean Valjean possesses.

The setting of this character is entirely modern. "Les Miserables" is a story of the city and

of poverty, and can not be dissociated from them by any wrench of thought, however violent. Not that urban life or poverty are new elements in the school of suffering. They are not new, as pain is not new. This is the difference. In the old ages, the city and poverty were taken as matters of course. Comfort was not a classic consideration. The being alive to conditions, sensitive to suffering, eager for diminution of the world's woes, is a modern thought, a Christ thought. Sociology is an application of Christ's teaching. He founded this science. Rome was the monster city of the empire, and possibly the monster city of ancient geography, and contained approximately, at its most populous period, two and one half millions of inhabitants. Man is gregarious as the flocks; he seems to fear solitude, and flees what he fears. Certain we are that in America, one hundred years ago, less than one-thirtieth of the population was in cities; now, about one-third is in city communities; and European cities are outgrowing American cities. In other words, at the present time, cities are growing in a ratio totally disproportionate to the growth of population; and this, not in the New World simply, but in the Old. London has nearly as many citizens as England had in the time of the Puritan Revolution. Men are nucleating in a fashion foreboding, but certain. A symptom of

the city life is, that he who is city bred knows no life apart from his city. He belongs to it as essentially as the Venetian belonged to Venice. The community is a veritable part of the man's self. Note this in Jean Valjean. It never occurs to him to leave Paris. Had he been a tree rooted in the soil along the Seine, he had not been more stationary. Men live, suffer, die, and hug their ugly tenements as parasites of these dilapidations, and draw their life-saps from such a decayed trunk. This human instinct for association is mighty in its impulsion. Not a few, but multitudes, prefer to be hungry and cold and live in a city to living with abundance of food and raiment in the country. Any one can see this at his alley or in his neighboring street. It is one of the latent insanities of the soul. The city is a live wire, and will not let go of him who grasps it. There is a stream of life pouring into cities, but no stream flowing into the country. The tide runs up the shore and back into the deep seas; not so these human tides. They pour into the Dead Sea basin of the urban community. Jean Valjean was a complete modern in his indissoluble identification with the city. As a matter of course, his was the criminal instinct, superadded to the gregarious instinct, which hides in a city labyrinth rather than the forests of the Amazon. Yet, taken all in all, he

evidently is a thorough modern in his urban instinct. The world was big, and he had gold for passage across seas; and there he had, in reason, found entire safety; but such a thought never entered his mind. Paris was the only sea he knew; here his plans for escape and plans for life clung tenaciously as a dead man's hand.

The second element of background for Jean Valjean is poverty. The people of this drama are named "the miserable ones." And poverty is modern and a modern question. All socialists, anarchists, and communists talk of poverty; this is their one theme. Superficial social reformers make poverty responsible for the total turpitude of men. Men are poor, hence criminal. Jean Valjean is poor—miserably poor; sees his sister's children hungry, and commits crime, is a thief; becomes a galley slave as punitive result. Ergo, poverty was the cause of crime, and poverty, and not Valjean, must be indicted; so runs the argument. This conclusion we deny. Let us consider. Poverty is not unwholesome. The bulk of men are poor, and always have been. Poverty is no new condition. Man's history is not one of affluence, but one of indigence. This is a patent fact. But a state of lack is not unwholesome, but on the contrary does great good. Poverty has supplied the world with most of the kings it boasts of. Palaces have not cradled the kings of thought,

service, and achievement. What greatest poet had luxury for a father? Name one. Poverty is the mother of kings. Who censures poverty censures the home from whose doors have passed the most illustrious of the sons of men. Christ's was a poverty so keen and so parsimonious that Occidentals can not picture it. More, current social reformers assume that the poor are unhappy; though if such reformers would cease dreaming, and learn seeing, they would reverse their creed. Riches do not command joy; for joy is not a spring rising from the depths where gold is found and gems gathered. Most men are poor, and most men are happy, or, if they are not, they may trace their sadness to sources other than lack of wealth. The best riches are the gifts of God, and can not be shut off by any sluicing; the choicest riches of the soul, such as knowledge and usefulness and love and God, are not subject to the tariff of gold. Poverty, we conclude, is not in itself grievous. Indeed, there are in poverty blessings which many of us know, and from which we would not be separated without keen regret. But penury is hard. When poverty pinches like winter's night, when fuel fails, and hunger is our company, then poverty becomes harsh and unpalatable, and not to be boasted of; though even penury has spurred many a sluggish life to conquering moods. When a man lies with

his face to the wall, paralytic, helpless, useless, a burden to himself and others, and hears the rub of his wife washing for a livelihood—and he loves her so; took her to his home in her fair girlhood, when her beauty bloomed like a garden of roses, and promised to keep her, and now she works for him all day and into the dark night, and loves to; but he turns his face to the wall, puts his one movable hand against his face, sobs so that his tears wash through his fingers and wet his pillow as with driving rain,—then poverty is pitiful. Or, when one sees his children hungry, tattered, with lean faces and eyes staring as with constant fear; sees them huddling under rags or cowering at a flicker meant for flame,—then poverty is hard; and then, "The poor always ye have with you," said our Christ, which remember and be pitiful!

But such penury, even, does not require crime. Valjean became a criminal from poverty; but himself felt now, as the days slipped from his life-store, that crime was not necessary. Theft is bad economics. The criminals on the dockets are not those pinched with poverty, as one may assure himself if he gives heed to criminal dockets. People prefer crime as a method of livelihood. These are criminals. The "artful dodger," in "Oliver Twist," is a picture of the average criminal. Honest poverty need not steal. In the writer's own city, the other day, a man accused of theft

pleaded his children's poverty as palliative of his crime; but in that city was abundant help for worthy poverty. That man lacked an absolute honesty. He and his could have been fed and clothed, and himself maintained his manly dignity and uncorrupted honesty. To blame society with criminality is a current method, but untrue and unwise; for thus we will multiply, not decimate, criminals. The honest man may be in penury; but he will have help, and need not shelter in a jail. Thus, then, these two items of modernity paint background for Jean Valjean's portrait; and in Jean Valjean, To-day has found a voice.

This man is a criminal and a galley slave, with yellow passport—his name, Jean Valjean. Hear his story. An orphan; a half-sullen lad, reared by his sister; sees her husband dead on a bed of rags, with seven orphans clinging in sobs to the dead hands. Jean Valjean labors to feed this motley company; denies himself bread, so that he may slip food into their hands; has moods of stalwart heroism; and never having had a sweetheart—pity him!—toils on, hopeless, under a sky robbed of blue and stars; leading a life plainly, wholly exceptional, and out of work in a winter when he was a trifle past twenty-six; hears his sister's children crying, "Bread, bread, give bread;" rises in sullen acerbity; smites his huge fist through a baker's window, and steals a loaf; is

arrested, convicted, sent to the galleys, and herded with galley slaves; attempts repeated escapes, is retaken, and at the age of forty-six shambles out of his galley slavery with a yellow passport, certifying this is "a very dangerous man;" and with a heart on which brooding has written with its biting stylus the story of what he believes to be his wrongs, Jean Valjean, bitter as gall against society, has his hands ready, aye, eager, to strike, no matter whom. Looked at askance, turned from the hostel, denied courtesy, food, and shelter, the criminal in him rushes to the ascendant, and he thrusts the door of the bishop's house open. Listen, he is speaking now, look at him! The bishop deals with him tenderly, as a Christian ought; sentimentally, but scarcely wisely. He has sentimentality rather than sentiment in his kindness; he puts a premium on Jean Valjean becoming a criminal again. To assume everybody to be good, as some philanthropists do, is folly, being so transparently false. The good bishop—bless him for his goodness!—who prays God daily not to lead him into temptation, why does he lead this sullen criminal into temptation? Reformatory methods should be sane. The bishop's methods were not sane. He meant well, but did not quite do well. Jean Valjean, sleeping in a bed of comfort, grows restless, wakens, rises, steals what is accessible, flees, is arrested, brought back, is exonerated by the bish-

op's tenderness, goes out free; steals from the little Savoyard, cries after the retreating lad to restore him his coin, fails to bring him back; fights with self, and with God's good help rises in the deep dark of night from the bishop's steps; walks out into a day of soul, trudges into the city of M——, to which he finds admission, not by showing the criminal's yellow passport, but by the passport of heroism, having on entrance rescued a child from a burning building; becomes a citizen, invents a process of manufacturing jet, accumulates a fortune, spends it lavishly in the bettering of the city where his riches were acquired; is benefactor to employee and city, and is called "Monsieur;" and after repeated refusals, becomes "Monsieur the Mayor;" gives himself up as a criminal to save a man unjustly accused, is returned to the galleys for the theft of the little Savoyard's forty-sous coin; by a heroic leap from the yardarm, escapes; seeks and finds Cossette, devotes his life to sheltering and loving her; runs his gauntlet of repeated perils with Javert, grows steadily in heroism, and sturdy, invigorating manhood; dies a hero and a saint, and an honor to human kind,—such is Jean Valjean's biography in meager outline. But the moon, on a summer's evening, "a silver crescent gleaming 'mid the stars," appears hung on a silver cord of the full moon's rim; and, as the crescent moon is not the burnished silver

of the complete circle, so no outline can include the white, bewildering light of this heroic soul. Jean Valjean is the biography of a redeemed life. The worst life contains the elements of redemption, as words contain the possibility of poetry. He was a fallen, vicious, desperate man; and from so low a level, he and God conspired to lift him to the levels where the angels live, than which a resurrection from the dead is no more potent and blinding miracle. Instead of giving this book the caption, "Jean Valjean," it might be termed the "History of the Redemption of a Soul;" and such a theme is worthy the study of this wide world of women and of men.

Initial in this redemptive work was the good bishop, whose words, "Jean Valjean, my brother, you belong no longer to evil, but to good," never lost their music or might to Valjean's spirit. Some man or woman stands on everybody's road to God. And Jean Valjean, with the bishop's words sounding in his ears—voices that will not silence—goes out with his candlesticks, goes trembling out, and starts on his anabasis to a new life; wandered all day in the fields, inhaled the odors of a few late flowers, his childhood being thus recalled; and when the sun was throwing mountain shadows behind hillocks and pebbles, as Jean Valjean sat and pondered in a dumb way, a Savoyard came singing on his way, tossing his

bits of money in his hands; drops a forty-sous piece near Jean Valjean, who, in a mood of inexplicable evil, places his huge foot upon it, nor listened to the child's entreaty, "My piece, monsieur;" and eager and more eager grows a child whose little riches were invaded, "My piece, my white piece, my silver;" and in his voice are tears—and what can be more touching than a child's voice touched with tears? "My silver;" and the lad shook the giant by the collar of his blouse—"I want my silver, my forty-sous piece"—and began to cry. A little lad a-sobbing! Jean Valjean, you who for so many years "have talked but little and never laughed;" Jean Valjean, pity the child; give him his coin. You were bought of the bishop for good. But in terrible voice he shouts: "Who is there? You here yet? You had better take care of yourself;" and the little lad runs, breathless and sobbing. Jean Valjean hears his sobbing, but made no move for restitution until the little Savoyard has passed from sight and hearing, when, waking as from some stupor, he rises, cries wildly through the night, "Petit Gervais! Petit Gervais!" and listened, and—no answer. Then he ran, ran toward restitution. Too late! too late! "Petit Gervais! Petit Gervais! Petit Gervais!" and, to a priest passing, "Monsieur, have you seen a child go by—a little fellow—Petit Gervais is his name?" And he calls him again

through the empty night; and the lad hears him not. There is no response, and for the first time since he passed to the galleys, Jean Valjean's heart swells, and he bursts into tears; for he was horrified at himself. His hardness had mastered him, even when the bishop's tenderness had thawed his winter heart. Jean Valjean was now afraid of himself, which is where moral strength has genesis. He goes back—back where? No matter, wait. He sees in his thought—in his thought he sees the bishop, and wept, shed hot tears, wept bitterly, with more weakness than a woman, with more terror than a child, and his life seemed horrible; and he walks—whither? No matter. But, past midnight, the stage-driver saw, as he passed, a man in the attitude of prayer, kneeling upon the pavement in the shadow before the bishop's door; and should you have spoken, "Jean Valjean!" he would not have answered you. He would not have heard. He is starting on a pilgrimage of manhood toward God. He saw the bishop; now he sees God, and here is hope; for so is God the secret of all good and worth, a thing to be set down as the axiom of religion and life. A conscience long dormant is now become regnant. Jean Valjean is a man again!

Goodness begets goodness. He climbed; and the mountain air and azure and fountains of clear waters, spouting from cliffs of snow and the far

altitudes, fed his spirit. God and he kept company, and, as is meet, goodness seemed native to him as lily blooms to lily stems. God was his secret, as God is the secret of us all. To scan his process of recovery is worth while. The bishop reminded him of God. Goodness and love in man are wings to help us soar to where we see that service, love, and goodness are in God—see that God is good and God is love. Seeing God, Jean Valjean does good. Philanthropy is native to him; gentleness seems his birthright; his voice is low and sweet; his face—the helpless look to it for help; his eyes are dreamy, like a poet's; he loves books; he looks not manufacturer so much as he looks poet; he passes good on as if it were coin to be handled; he suffers nor complains; his silence is wide, like that of the still night; he frequently walks alone and in the country; he becomes a god to Fantine, for she had spit upon him, and he had not resented; he adopts means for the rescue of Cossette. In him, goodness moves finger from the lips, breaks silence, and becomes articulate. Jean Valjean is brave, magnanimous, of sensitive conscience, hungry-hearted, is possessed of the instincts of motherhood, bears being misjudged without complaint, is totally forgetful of himself, and is absolute in his loyalty to God—qualities which lift him into the elect life of manhood.

Jean Valjean was brave. He and fear never met. The solitary fear he knew was fear of himself, and lest he might not live for good as the bishop had bidden him; but fear from without had never crossed his path. His was the bravery of conscience. His strength was prodigious, and he scrupled not to use it. Self-sparing was no trait of his character. Like another hero we have read of, he would "gladly spend and be spent" for others, and bankrupt himself, if thereby he might make others rich. There is a physical courage, brilliant as a shock of armies, which feels the conflict and leaps to it as the storm-waves leap upon the sword edges of the cliffs—a courage which counts no odds. There is another courage, moral rather than physical. Valjean possessed both, with moral courage in ascendency. He has the agility and strength sometimes found in criminals. He is now in the galleys for life. One day, while engaged in furling sail, a sailor has toppled from the yard; but in falling caught a rope, but hangs, swinging violently, like some mad pendulum. The height is dizzying. Death seems certain, when a convict, clad in red, and with a green cap, runs up for rescue, lets himself down alongside of the swaying sailor, now in the last extremity of weakness, and ready to drop like a winter leaf. Valjean (for it is he) oscillates violently to and

fro, while the throng below watch breathlessly. His peril is incredible, but his is a bravery which does not falter, and a skill which equals bravery. Valjean is swayed in the wind as the swaying sailor, until he catches him in his arm, makes him fast to the rope, clambers up, reaches the yard, hauls up the sailor, and carries him to a place of safety. And the throng below, breathless till now, applauded and cried, "This man must be pardoned." Then it is that he, free once more, leaps down—falls from the dizzying height, the multitude thinks—leaps down into the seas, and wins liberty. Jean Valjean is heroic. His moral courage, which is courage at its noon, is discovered best in his rescue of Fauchelevent, old, and enemy—an enmity engendered by Madeleine's prosperity—to Monsieur Madeleine. The old man has fallen under his cart, and is being surely crushed to death. The mayor joins the crowd gathered about the unfortunate car-man; offers a rising price for one who will go under the cart and rescue the old man. Javert is there—keen of eye and nostril as a vulture—and Jean Valjean is his prey. He believes the mayor to be Jean Valjean, and, as the mayor urges some one to rescue the perishing man, says, with speech cold as breath from a glacier, "I have known but one man who was equal to this task, and he was a convict and in

the galleys." The old man moans, "How it crushes me!" and, hearing that cry, under the cart the mayor crawls; and while those beside hold their breath, he, lying flat under the weight, lifts twice, ineffectually, and, with one herculean effort, lifts again, and the cart slowly rises, and many willing hands helping from without, the old man is saved; and Monsieur Madeleine arises, pale, dripping with sweat, garments muddy and torn, while the old man whom he has rescued kisses his knees and calls him the good God. And the mayor looks at Javert with tranquil eye, though knowing full well that this act of generous courage in the rescue of an enemy has doomed himself. This is moral courage of celestial order.

His magnanimity is certainly apparent,—in the rescue of his enemy, Fauchelevent; in his release of his arch-enemy, Javert; in his presence within the barricade to protect Marius, who had, as a lover, robbed him of the one blossom that had bloomed in the garden of his heart, save only the passing bishop and the abiding God. No pettiness is in him. He loves and serves after a fashion learned of Christ. If compelled to admire his courage, we are no less compelled to pay homage to his magnanimity.

His was a hungry heart. Love he had never known; he had never had a sweetheart. And now all pent-up love of a long life empties its precious

ointment on the head of Cossette. He was all the mother she ever knew or needed to know. Heaven made her rich in such maternity as his. Mother instinct is in all good lives, and belongs to man. Maternity and paternity are met in the best manhood. The tenderness of motherhood must soften a man's touch to daintiness, like an evening wind's caress, before fatherhood is perfect. All his youthhood, which knew not any woman's lips to kiss; all his manhood, which had never shared a hearth with wife or child,—all this unused tenderness now administers to the wants of this orphan, Cossette. His rescue of her from the Thenardiers is poetry itself. He had the instincts of a gentleman. The doll he brought her for her first Christmas gift was forerunner of a thousand gifts of courtesy and love. See, too, the mourning garments he brought and laid beside her bed the first morning he brought her to his garret, and watched her slumber as if he had been appointed by God to be her guardian angel. To him life henceforth meant Cossette. He was her servant always. For her he fought for his life as if it had been an unutterable good. He lost himself, which is the very crown of motherhood's devotion. He was himself supplanted in her affections by her lover, Marius, and his heart was stabbed as if by poisoned daggers; for was not Cossette wife, daughter, sister, brother, mother,

father, friend—all? But if his heart was breaking, she never guessed it. He hid his hurt, though dying of heartbreak.

Then, too, Jean Valjean is misjudged, and by those who should have trusted him as they trusted God. We find it hard to be patient with Marius, and are not patient with Cossette. Her selfishness is not to be condoned. Her contrition and her tears come too late. Though Valjean forgives her, we do not forgive her. She deserves no forgiveness. Marius's honor was of the amateur order, lacking depth and breadth. He was superficial, judging by hearing rather than by eyes and heart. We have not patience to linger with his wife and him, but push past them to the hero spirit, whom they have not eyes to see nor hearts to understand. Jean Valjean misjudged, and by Marius and Cossette! Impossible! Javert may do that; Fantine, not knowing him, may do that, but once knowing him she had as lief distrusted day to bring the light as to have distrusted him. Misjudged, and by those he loved most, suffered for, more than died for! Poor Valjean! This wakes our pity and our tears. Before, we have watched him, and have felt the tug of battle on him; now the mists fall, and we put our hands before our eyes and weep. This saint of God misjudged by those for whom he lives! Yet this is no solitary pathos. Were all

hearts' history known, we should know how many died misjudged. All Jean Valjean does has been misinterpreted. We distrust more and more circumstantial evidence. It is hideous. No jury ought to convict a man on evidence of circumstances. Too many tragedies have been enacted because of such. Marius thought he was discerning and of a sensitive honor. He thought it evident that Jean Valjean had slain Javert, and had slain Monsieur Madeleine, whose fortune he has offered as Cossette's marriage portion. Poor Jean Valjean! You a murderer, a marauder—you! Marius acts with frigid honor. Valjean will not live with Marius and Cossette, being too sensitive therefor, perceiving himself distrusted by Marius, but comes to warm his hands and heart at the hearth of Cossette's presence; and he is stung when he sees no fire in the reception-room. The omission he can not misinterpret. He goes again, and the chairs are removed. Marius may have honor, but his honor is cruel, like an inquisitor with rack and thumbscrew; and then Jean Valjean goes no more, but day by day suns his heart by going far enough to look at the house where Cossette is—no more; then his eyes are feverish to catch sight of her habitation as parched lips drink at desert springs. Misjudged! O, that is harder to bear than all his hurts!

Then we will not say of Valjean, "He has

conscience," but rather, we will say, "He is conscience." Valjean's struggle with conscience is one of the majestic chapters of the world's literature, presenting, as it does, the worthiest and profoundest study of Christian conscience given by any dramatist since Christ opened a new chapter for conscience in the soul. Monsieur Madeleine, the mayor, is rich, respected, honored, is a savior of society, sought out by the king for political preferment. One shadow tracks him like a nightmare. Javert is on his track, instinct serving him for reason. At last, Javert himself thinks Jean Valjean has been found; for a man has been arrested, is to be tried, will doubtless be convicted, seeing evidence is damning. Now, Monsieur Madeleine, mayor of M——, your fear is all but ended. An anodyne will be administered to your pain. Jean Valjean has known many a struggle. He thought his fiercest battles fought; but all his yesterdays of conflict are as play contests and sham battles matched with this. Honor, usefulness, long years of service, love, guardianship of Cossette, and fealty to a promise given a dying mother—all beckon to him. He is theirs; and has he not suffered enough? More than enough. Let this man alone, that is all. Let him alone! He sees it. Joy shouts in his heart, "Javert will leave me in quiet." "Let us not interfere with God;" and his resolution is formed. But con-

science looks into his face. Ha! the bishop, too, is beside him. Conscience speaks, and is saying, "Let the real Valjean go and declare himself." This is duty. Conscience speaks, and his words are terrible, "Go, declare thyself." Jean Valjean's sin is following him. That evening he had robbed Petit Gervais; therefore he is imperiled. Sin finds man out. But the fight thickens, and Valjean thinks to destroy the mementos of his past, and looks fearfully toward the door, bolted as it is, and gathers from a secret closet his old blue blouse, an old pair of trousers, an old haversack, and a great thorn stick, and incontinently flings them into the flames. Then, noticing the silver candlesticks, the bishop's gifts, "These, too, must be destroyed," he says, and takes them in his hands, and stirs the fire with one of the candlesticks, when he hears a voice clamoring, "Jean Valjean! Jean Valjean! Jean Valjean!" Conscience and a battle, but the battle was not lost; for you see him in the prisoners' dock, declaring, "I am Jean Valjean;" and those of the court dissenting, he persisted, declared his recognition of some galley prisoners, urging still, "I am Jean Valjean; you see clearly that I am Jean Valjean;" and those who saw and heard him were dazed; and he said: "All who are here think me worthy of pity, do you not? Do you not? Great God! When I think of what I was on the point

of doing, I think myself worthy of envy;" and he was gone. And next, Javert is seizing him fiercely, brutally, imperiously, as a criminal for whom there is no regard. With this struggle of conscience and its consequent victory, "The Charge of the Light Brigade" becomes tawdry and garish. The sight moves us as the majestic minstrelsy of seas in tempest. No wonder that they who looked at Valjean, as he stood declaring himself to be the real Valjean, were blinded with a great light.

And his heart is so hungry, and his loyalty to God so urgent and so conquering. Jean Valjean has suffered much. Ulysses, buffeted by wars and stormy seas, has had a life of calm as compared with this new hero. Ulysses' battles were from without; Valjean's battles were from within. But if he has suffered greatly, he has also been greatly blessed. Struggle for goodness against sin is its own reward. We do not give all and get nothing. There are compensations. Recompense of reward pursues goodness as foam a vessel's track. If Jean Valjean loved Cossette with a passion such as the angels know; if she was his sun, and made the spring, there was a sense in which Cossette helped Valjean. There was response, not so much in the return of love as in that he loved her; and his love for her helped him in his dark hours, helped him when he needed

help the most, helped him on with God. He needs her to love, as our eyes need the fair flowers and the blue sky. His life was not empty, and God had not left himself without witness in Jean Valjean's life; for he had had his love for Cossette.

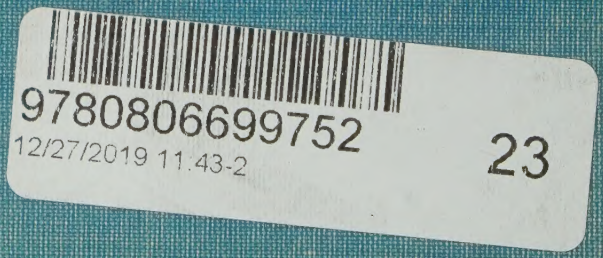
But he is bereft. Old age springs on him suddenly, as Javert had done in other days. He has, apparently without provocation, passed from strength to decrepitude. Since he sees Cossette no more, he has grown gray, stooped, decrepit. There is no morning now, since he does not see Cossette. You have seen him walking to the corner to catch sight of her house. How feeble he is! Another day, walking her way, but not so far; and the next, and the next, walking; but the last day he goes scarce beyond his own threshold. And now he can not go down the stairs; now he is in his own lonely room, alone. He sees death camping in his silent chamber, but feels no fright. No, no! rather,

> "Death, like a friend's voice from a distant field
> Approaching, called.
> . . . . . .
> For sure no gladlier does the stranded wreck
> See, through the gray skirts of a lifting squall,
> The boat that bears the hope of life approach
> To save the life despaired of, than he saw
> Death dawning on him, and the close of all."

But Cossette, Cossette! To see her once, just once, only once! To touch her hand—O that were

heaven! But he says to his heart, "I shall not touch her hand, and I shall not see her face—no more, no more!" And the little garments he brought her when he took her from her slavery with the Thenardiers, there they are upon his bed, where he can touch them, as if they were black tresses of the woman he had loved and lost. The bishop's candlesticks are lit. He is about to die, and writes in his poor, sprawling fashion to Cossette—writes to her. He fronts her always, as the hills front the dawn. He ceases, and sobs like a breaking heart. O! "She is a smile that has passed over me. I shall never see her again!" And the door dashes open; Marius and Cossette are come. Joy, joy to the old heart! Jean Valjean thinks it is heaven's morning. Marius has discovered that Jean Valjean is not his murderer, but his savior; that he has, at imminent peril of his life, through the long, oozy quagmire of the sewer, with his giant strength, borne him across the city, saved him; and now, too late, Marius began to see in Jean Valjean "a strangely lofty and saddened form," and has come to take this great heart home. But God will do that himself. Jean Valjean is dying. He looks at Cossette as if he would take a look which would endure through eternity, kisses a fold of her garment, and half articulates, "It—is—nothing to die;" then suddenly rises, walks to the wall, brings back a

crucifix, lays it near his hand. "The Great Martyr," he says; fondles Marius and Cossette; sobs to Cossette, "Not to see you broke my heart;" croons to himself, "You love me;" puts his hands upon their heads in a caress, saying, "I do not see clearly now." Later he half whispered, "I see a light!" And a man and woman are raining kisses on a dead man's hands. And on that blank stone, over a nameless grave in the cemetery of Pere la Chaise, let some angel sculptor chisel, "Here lies Jean Valjean, Hero."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